

Public Works Committee
meeting of Tuesday, August 2, 2005
1st floor meeting room, Town Hall

present: Vince O'Connor, Michael Cann, Doug Lowing, Guilford
Mooring, Rob Crowner

1. Meeting called to order at 7:10pm.

2. Old Business

The committee reviews and unanimously approves the minutes of June 7 and July 19, as previously amended.

Michael inquires when the Select Board will take up the issue of right turns on red, as he intends to register a minority opinion explaining his concern that people with disabilities would be placed in greater danger at such intersections. Rob believes this point was mentioned in the memo that was sent to the Select Board.

In reference to a press release on the Atkins Corner project that he noticed at the reception window, Vince asks that memos and press releases about issues of relevance to the Public Works Committee be sent to PWC members so that meetings and presentations do not have to be duplicated.

3. Nuisance flooding

Vince expresses concern about reports of recent road flooding that he has received. Sections of West Pomeroy Lane, Route 9 (Fort River Bridge), and University Drive have experienced periods of impassibility during heavy rains this summer. Vince would like to know if this matter can be addressed and whether the PWC can play a role. Guilford explains that the water begins receding as soon as the rain stops and is cleared up within a couple of hours.

a. Route 9: The problem on Route 9 is that the storm drain fills up, so when the river gets high it floods the road. The solution would require increasing the storage capacity of the nearby storm drains - as well as treatment of water runoff, which was not the case when the drain was originally built. The water may rise to a depth of six inches (the height of the curb), after which it simply flows back into the river. This event occurs about once a year.

Rob wonders why this should be considered more significant than a heavy snowstorm that temporarily blocks a road or makes driving hazardous. Vince considers flooding a dangerous phenomenon because of the inexperience of drivers. Additionally, it can be very inconvenient. If it can be alleviated at an acceptable cost, that may be worth considering. Vince requests information on initial construction and annual maintenance costs, so that the committee can conduct an informed discussion about whether to make a recommendation.

b. University Drive: Guilford states that this situation is more complicated because the area around it (roughly bounded by Meadow Street and Routes 9 and 116) is a well-established wetland. Drainage here depends on how saturated the ground already is and

how heavily the rain falls. Michael observes that the problem is exacerbated by all of the paving that covers the ground in the area and is only getting worse. Vince suggests that the Conservation Commission may want to take another look at this area, particularly in light of planned new construction in Hadley. Guilford explains that the detention tanks associated with the new construction will be designed to maintain consistent flow into the drainage system even during heavy rain.

Michael points out that the water table is very shallow throughout the area and continued development seems to assume that this can be maneuvered around. Worrying about one section of University Drive overlooks the fact that this is a regional - or wider - problem. Vince states that the Mill River gets water from the Leverett/Shutebury/North Amherst watershed, from UMass, and from runoff from the town center.

c. West Pomeroy Lane: Vince observes that the adjacent golf course is a floodplain. Guilford state that installing culverts would trigger environmental permitting, and Vince notes that raising the road would risk major damage in the event of a significant rainfall due to high water pressure.

d. Summary: Guilford agrees that Amherst is moving in the direction of increased flood risk, but in a much slower way than many other places. He states that a current federal program provides low-interest loans for communities to assess their stormwater drainage systems and educate people about how they work. He notes that Amherst's storm and sanitary drainage systems are at least 95% segregated; the DPW uncovers a few improper connections every year - some quite old.

Michael asserts that people have to be made aware of the issues that development brings; there isn't going to be enough money to pay for fixes in the future. Vince states that currently existing natural stormwater storage areas need to be preserved. We need to be proactive.

Guilford agrees to distribute to committee members information on phase II of the federal program, as well as rough estimates for repair solutions for the Route 9 and West Pomeroy Lane flood areas. Vince asks that minutes of this meeting be forwarded to the Conservation Commission to alert its members of the concerns of the PWC.

In reponse to a question about other flood trouble spots, Guilford adds that there are areas in Amherst where beavers have damaged the natural storage system, thereby threatening flooding on nearby streets.

4. The meeting adjourns at 8:20pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Robert J. Crouner□